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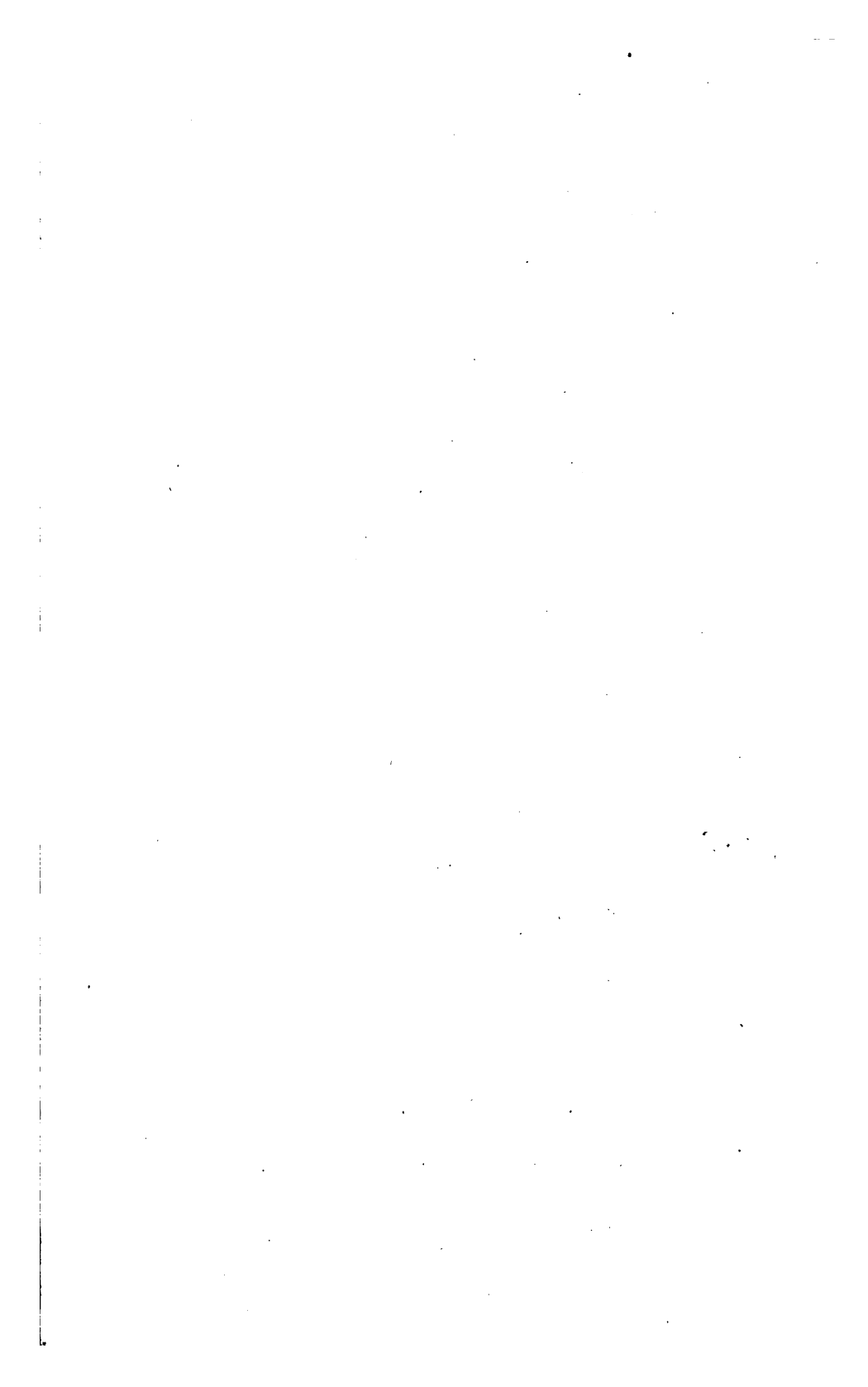
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A L E T T E R

TO

RICHD. COBDEN, ESQ., M.P.,

ON THE

NEW GOVERNMENT MEASURE



OF

EDUCATION.

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BY EDWARD BAINES.

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## LETTER.

MY DEAR SIR,

Permit an old fellow-labourer in the cause of Free Trade, to address to you a few remarks on behalf of Free Education.

In your zeal for all improvement, you have been ardently desirous to see the whole people educated. But, jealous of Governmental control, you have wished that the schools should be under local and popular management: and, regardful of the rights of conscience, you have objected to the system of the Minutes of Council, which, as they absolutely require religious instruction, have the effect (to use your own words) of "compelling every man to pay for the teaching of every other man's religion."

You have seen, however, that there are insuperable obstacles to the adoption of that plan of education which you regard as in the abstract the best. Sitting for months on the Manchester Education Committee, you find the earnest friends of education in that city divided into three irreconcilable parties, and even the two parties who agree in wishing for a rate, diametrically opposed to each other on the question whether religion shall or shall not be taught in the schools. Travelling round the country, you find that the same divisions exist everywhere, and your knowledge of history tells you that the English are too tenacious of their conscientious opinions to give them up for any human authority. You further see that there is the utmost danger, if Parliament legislates at all, of its not giving the management of the schools to local and representative bodies, but to one central power forming a part of the Executive Government: and your observation of Governmental management leads you both to distrust its efficiency, and to apprehend serious evils from giving to any set of Ministers the patronage and power arising from the control of all the schools of England.

Thus led to doubt whether any plan of national education is practicable in England, you are thrown back upon your old principles of freedom and independence; and you ask yourself whether, after all, the best plan, and the only plan consistent with justice, may not be, that the people should be left to educate themselves, with the aids that benevolent and religious principle may give to the honourable efforts of the humbler classes. But you naturally wish that Government, if it cannot properly educate, should at least not prevent education,—that it should remove all those fiscal fetters which a false policy has laid upon the press; and you are inclined to believe that, if this is done, the vigour and elasticity of freedom will do more than all the interference of authority. Accordingly, in the debate on Mr. Milner Gibson's motion for removing the taxes on knowledge, you thus avowed your feeling:—

"After paying great attention to the question of national education, he (Mr. Cobden) had arrived at the deliberate conviction, that, in the interests of the great mass of the people, if he could see the taxes

upon knowledge removed, *he would agree to abolish every grant for education given by that House.* (Hear, hear.) He despaired at present of seeing an efficient system of national education carried; and *give him the removal of these impediments to knowledge, and he would willingly give up all the sums now voted for education.*" (Cheers.)

There sounded the old tone, that for so many years rung, clear as a bell, from hundreds of platforms over broad England. It was the tone of *freedom*. It was the tone of *independence*. It was the tone of *reliance on the people*. There

"RICHARD was HIMSELF again."

Yes, that sounded like the knell of educational protection, as heretofore of agricultural protection. To the Government it proclaimed, "Hands off!" To the people it said, "Depend upon yourselves!" When timid men, of contracted views, told you formerly that agriculture could not exist without protection, you replied that it could exist better without than with. Animated by the confidence of yourself and your co-workers, Lord John Russell was at length emboldened to declare that "protection was the *bane* of agriculture." So now say I, with a confidence as absolute as ever glowed in your breast, that "protection will be the *bane* of education," and that if you want a vigorous, a healthful, an English system of education, it must be one which finds in the hearts and minds of the people themselves its source and its stay.

Is it not a marvellous thing, that Government, which for a hundred and forty years has been maintaining a stamp duty on newspapers and an excise duty on paper,\*—which till after the great Revolution held a censorship over the press,—which never did anything for education till fifty years after Robert Raikes established Sunday schools, and thirty years after Joseph Lancaster opened day schools for the poor,—is it not, I say, a marvellous thing that Government should now attempt to set itself up as the patron, paymaster, and manager of all our common schools? Does it afford the best augury for the progress of education? Is there in Governments such a steady and consistent liberality, such an openness to improvement, such an instant appreciation of popular wants, such a self-denying renunciation of all temptations to undue patronage, that we can confide to them and their stipendiaries the control of all our schools?

I have for some time declared my conviction that Government would be promoting education legitimately by removing all the taxes on knowledge, but that it could not go beyond this, to take the active superintendence of education, without violating great principles, and incurring serious evils. When comparing the education of the United States with that of England, I have argued that the greater prevalence of education in the former country was owing less to their schools than to the vast amount of their cheap literature, which gives every inducement both to young and old to keep up the power of reading and writing which they have acquired at school.† I find a striking confirmation of this view in the evidence given by the Hon. Horace Greeley, the proprietor of one

\* The excise duty on paper was first laid in 1711, and the stamp duty on newspapers and periodicals about the same time.

† I do not assign this as the *only* reason: the comfortable circumstances of the people are a still stronger reason.

of the principal newspapers of New York, before the Committee of our House of Commons on Newspaper Stamps in 1851. The following questions and answers appear:—

“Do not you consider that newspaper reading is calculated to keep up a habit of reading?—*Answer.* I think it is worth all the schools in the country. I think it creates a taste for reading in every child's mind, and it increases his interest in his lessons; he is attached to study from the habit of always seeing a newspaper, and hearing it read, I think.

“Supposing that you had your schools as now, *but that your newspaper press were reduced within the limits of the press in England*, do not you think that the habit of reading acquired at school would be frequently laid aside?—*Answer.* I think that the habit would not be acquired, and that often reading would fall into disuse.”

This evidence fully justifies you in the importance you attach to the removal of the taxes on knowledge. I am convinced that the dearth or cheapness of periodical literature has nearly as much to do with the ability of the poor to read and write as schools themselves. In England thousands learn the arts of reading and writing, who lose those arts soon after they leave school, from the want of opportunity to exercise them. The plentifulness of books, magazines, newspapers, and tracts, operates in many ways,—upon parents and upon children, directly and indirectly,—by provoking curiosity, by kindling intelligence, by alluring the taste, and then by gratifying the inclinations it has awakened. See the ardour with which many young children, in nurseries well supplied with books suited to them, will set themselves to read the stories and pore over the pictures; whilst those same children, without such attractions, would have spent their activity in rambling and mischief. This is said, not to dispense with the school, but rather to show how parents and children will best learn to prize it, and derive from it the greatest good; and also, on the other hand, to show our legislators the true way of promoting education.

This allusion to our cheap literature leads me further to remind you of the immense improvement that has taken place in the supply of intellectual food for old and young since you and I were boys. How scanty and how poor was the stock of children's books, and of all our periodical literature, in those days! I believe I shall be far below the mark if I say that books and periodicals especially suited to the humbler classes and to children have multiplied *twenty-fold*: perhaps I might say *fifty-fold*. They have done this even with a considerable weight of taxation; and what would they do if relieved from every burden? But by what agency has all this mighty improvement been effected? Of course, by the Government! It was no doubt the enlightened zeal of Cabinets and Parliaments, and the liberal votes of public money, that provided for the people this vast accession of mental food! No? Do you deny it? But how else *could* it have been done? Where else is there *money* enough? Where is there *skill* and *enterprise* enough? Where is there sufficient determination to remove bad literature, and supply good? Who but Government *could* have *trained* such superior authors? Who else *could* have worked the vast machine of the *press*, with all its subsidiary wheels,—of writing, and editing, and correcting, and embellishing, and publishing, and binding,—drawing the materials from every region, every science, every art, every department of reason, imagination, and learn-



ing,—with every day some new improvement, some ingenious adaptation, some unthought-of approach to the human understanding, some fresh charm to captivate and entice men into knowledge, some reduction of price, some beautiful device to thrust literature into men's hands and insinuate it into their minds,—and all with the fertility and spontaneousness with which flowers burst upon us in the Spring ;—who or what *else*, I want to know, *but the Government*, COULD have achieved such wonders ?

'Fudge!' you exclaim, in towering indignation : ' don't mock me. ' You may as well tell me that that lump of stone planned and built St. ' Paul's. Governments are slow of devising improvements, and slower ' still of executing them. Such things are not in their nature, not even ' within their province. Governments are established to protect life and ' property against internal and external wrong, and be thankful if they ' do that decently. But it is not for them to supply the mental and ' moral wants of their people, any more than to supply their physical ' wants : and you are sensible what a pretty piece of work they make ' of *that*, when they attempt it. Instead of feeding us, they give us ' Corn Laws : instead of clothing us, they tax the materials we would ' import to clothe ourselves.\* Instead of conducting the press, they ' burden and fetter it. Governments are about the most unwieldy of ' all machines, with the least natural disposition to improvement, nay, ' with a positive repugnance to it. Their genius is to stand still ; and ' not altogether a bad genius either, if they will only not prevent others ' from moving. As for the great and beautiful improvements you ' speak of so admiringly, you will find that they have all sprung naturally ' from the faculties with which God has furnished men, working under ' a system of *freedom*, and with the stimulus of *competition*. Men are ' not stones, to be carved into shape by their Governments. They are ' not even children, to be nursed and dandled and led and chid by them. ' No. Men are *men* :—beings, not things ; quick with life, and full of ' ethereal springs and wheels ; wondrously endowed by the great Creator ' with powers, faculties, and affections, for all domestic and social ' purposes ; qualified to have dominion over the creatures, to search the ' wide domain of science, to know and serve the supreme God, and to ' do His will. Out of this pregnant soil of human nature, cultivated ' by lawful self-interest, and under the stimulus of free competition, ' have sprung all the inventions and improvements you refer to. ' Government did not move any of them with one of its fingers. And ' beware of calling in Government to do what does not belong to it. ' Never ask it to do what you can and ought to do for yourselves. If ' you could be thus relieved, it would be a calamity to you. But the ' chances are a hundred to one that Government will mismanage the ' business. And remember that you cannot in reason ask it to do a ' thing, without giving it *the power and authority of a master to govern* ' in regard to that thing. If, for instance, you were to ask it to sup- ' port the Press, it must govern the Press ;—if the Pulpit, it must ' govern the Pulpit.'

\* So did our own Government formerly, and so do the American, French, German, and all other Governments, except Turks and savages, to the present day.

And if we ask it to support the *School*, my dear Sir, *must it not also GOVERN the SCHOOL?* And would that be for the advantage of England?

Observe the machinery of *entire and perfect masterdom over education* which Sir James Kay Shuttleworth has devised, and which Lord John Russell has actually brought in a bill to sanction. The Municipal towns have, indeed, a choice whether they will adopt it; but, having adopted it, their freedom is gone,—they will have entered into the house of bondage, and, *willy, nilly*, they must make bricks for Pharaoh. But for the non-municipal towns and the rural districts, including (I suppose) at least *five-sixths* of the population, the plan might be brought at once into play.

In my judgment, Sir, the Bill “for the promotion of Education in Cities and Boroughs in England” creates an *educational* DICTATORSHIP, not indeed absolutely without check or responsibility, but as nearly so as anything can be in this country. It does so in this way. The Bill proposes for municipal boroughs, and the plan proposes for all the rest of the country, to give very great advantages to schools which accept Government aid and inspection;—advantages so great that there would be a kind of necessity for accepting them, if they were accepted by any of the schools in the district. That aid consists of two great contributions, one of 3d. per week per scholar, and the other of 2d., making together 5d., towards a total expense of 8d. per week per scholar. The remaining 3d. must be made up by the school-pence and voluntary contributions. Now is it not certain that a school which once accepted Government money to the extent of *five-eighths* of its expenditure, would from that time forth be *ENTIRELY dependent upon the Government?* For, supposing the Government money to be withdrawn, the expenses of the school could not be met by the remaining *three-eighths*: nor could that *three-eighths* be increased to the point that would pay the teachers and meet all the other expenses. The parents, accustomed to the lower charge, would not double or treble their payments. The contributors to the school would be as little likely to raise their subscriptions two or three-fold. Therefore the Government money, though it would not be the whole, would be indispensably necessary. If it were withdrawn, the school could not be kept open. This being so, it becomes important to inquire who has the power to give or to withhold the Government money: and the answer is, that the Government Inspector has that power, subject only to an appeal to the Committee of Council on Education. If the Inspector withheld his certificate of approbation from a schoolmaster, an assistant teacher, or an apprentice, any one of them must lose his situation, and without the slightest prospect of obtaining another. It is true there is an appeal from the Inspector to his employers, the Committee of Council: but what chance would there be for a poor discharged teacher in such an appeal? At all events, the Council and their Inspectors have between them entire control over the school. Now, I appeal to you, is it consistent with the general freedom of our institutions, with justice to the teachers, with due respect to those whose liberality originated and in part supports the schools, with decent regard for the Town Councils who raise a considerable part of the funds, or with an enlightened view to the probable interest of education itself, to give to a set of Government officers this

arbitrary control over the schools of England? I am sure your reply will be an indignant *No*.

But if the injustice is great and the dictation well nigh absolute, then consider on what a scale of magnitude that injustice and dictation must prevail. There are *fifteen thousand* public schools in England. If all were brought under the system, the teachers, with their assistants and stipendiary apprentices, would be about *fifty thousand*. (Sir James K. Shuttleworth reckons on *twenty thousand* schools and about *seventy thousand* assistants and pupil teachers.) Could all these schools and teachers be brought under the pay of the Government, and made dependent on the annual certificate of a Government officer for *continued existence*, without conferring an enormous increase of power and patronage on the Executive? I appeal to you as a man of political experience. Would such a thing be desirable? Would it be safe? To me the proposition seems full of constitutional danger. But I want public men, and especially I want Liberals, to judge for themselves. If it please you gentlemen of Parliament to put the education of England under the dominion of an army of clerical Inspectors, who shall go about venting their insolence—for it is pure infatuation to suppose that almost unlimited power will not produce insolence—on all the teachers and school-managers of England, you can do it. But I will plainly state my mind upon the subject,—that any man who lends himself to the support of such a measure, will be a means of doing greater mischief to the people than even the repeal of the Corn Laws did good.

To the Town Councils this measure would be a shameful insult. It would in the first instance, indeed, leave them the power of saying *No*; but with the knowledge that at any meeting of any year—I may even say at *every* meeting of a Town Council, if individuals were so disposed—the proposition might be renewed, until a sufficient majority was gained. And should the Bill once be sanctioned, there would be no *locus penitentie*. From that time forward the Town Council would be treated as if it were worthy of no discretion. It would never be able to revoke its judgment. Nor is this to be wondered at. For if the schools should once be made dependent on a public rate, the rate could not be withdrawn without destroying them. As to the management or control of the schools, the Town Council would have no more share in it than the tax-collector. It would have nothing to do but to pay and to register. Is this consistent with the principle of local self-government on which our Municipal system is founded, and to which principle we are so mainly indebted for our public liberties?

You are able to judge of the effect which such a measure would have on the peace and tranquillity of boroughs, because you know something of the staunch Voluntaries who constitute so large a part of the strength of the Liberal party in those boroughs. The dissension would be intolerable: it might continue for many years, embittering every Council Meeting or Municipal Election: and it is worth the consideration of any Liberal Minister or statesman, that the rupture and strife would be chiefly among the Liberal party, who may be indebted to this measure for many a defeat at Parliamentary and Municipal Elections. Such a measure would be a very poor preparative for bringing forward Parliamentary Reform, if the people are to have anything to do with carrying it; or for any movement in favour of peace or economy.

But touching economy, have you seen the estimate of Sir James Kay Shuttleworth, of the cost which the scheme is to entail upon the country? TWO MILLIONS sterling, or, including the central administration, about TWO MILLIONS AND A HALF, is estimated by Sir James as its cost, in addition to £1,100,000 or £1,200,000 already raised by the people themselves. What think you, Sir, of such an addition to the general and local taxation of the country? Is it calculated to make the people in love with education? Will it render the cause popular either in boroughs or in counties? Will the financial Reformers give it their sanction? Or how will it square with the idea of getting off the taxes on knowledge, the income tax, or any other taxes?

But, lastly, what shall we say of this immense additional outlay, arbitrarily incurred, when it appears that the number of children receiving education in day-schools is already, according to the Census of 1851, 2,108,473, or 1 in  $8\frac{1}{2}$  of the whole population, and that the proportion required by the professed educationists is only 1 in 8? What shall we say, when it appears that since 1818, according to official documents, and certainly since the beginning of the century, the progress of education has been at least FOUR-FOLD as great as the progress of population? What shall we say, when it is known we have reached this point, with in a fraction of the desideratum set before us—by means of efforts to which the Government has not contributed *one-fifteenth* of the cost of building schools, or *one penny* of the cost of maintaining them (except only the extra allowances to teachers and pupil teachers since 1847)? What shall we say, lastly, when it is known that the Sunday schools contain fully as many scholars as the day schools, and that they are supported wholly by the voluntary zeal of religious men?

If, under such circumstances, Parliament should sanction such a measure as that laid before it by the Government, it will surpass all I could have conceived possible of scandalous waste and empirical folly. You, I am certain, will not be found among the supporters of the measure. Nor can you be content to give it a feeble opposition. You will assuredly denounce it on many grounds; and you will, I trust, bid a final adieu to the very idea of National Education,—seeing that the People are now proved to be able to educate themselves, to do it without so much as a suspicion of injustice, civil or religious, and to do it with the prospect, under a system of open competition and perfect freedom, of future indefinite improvement.

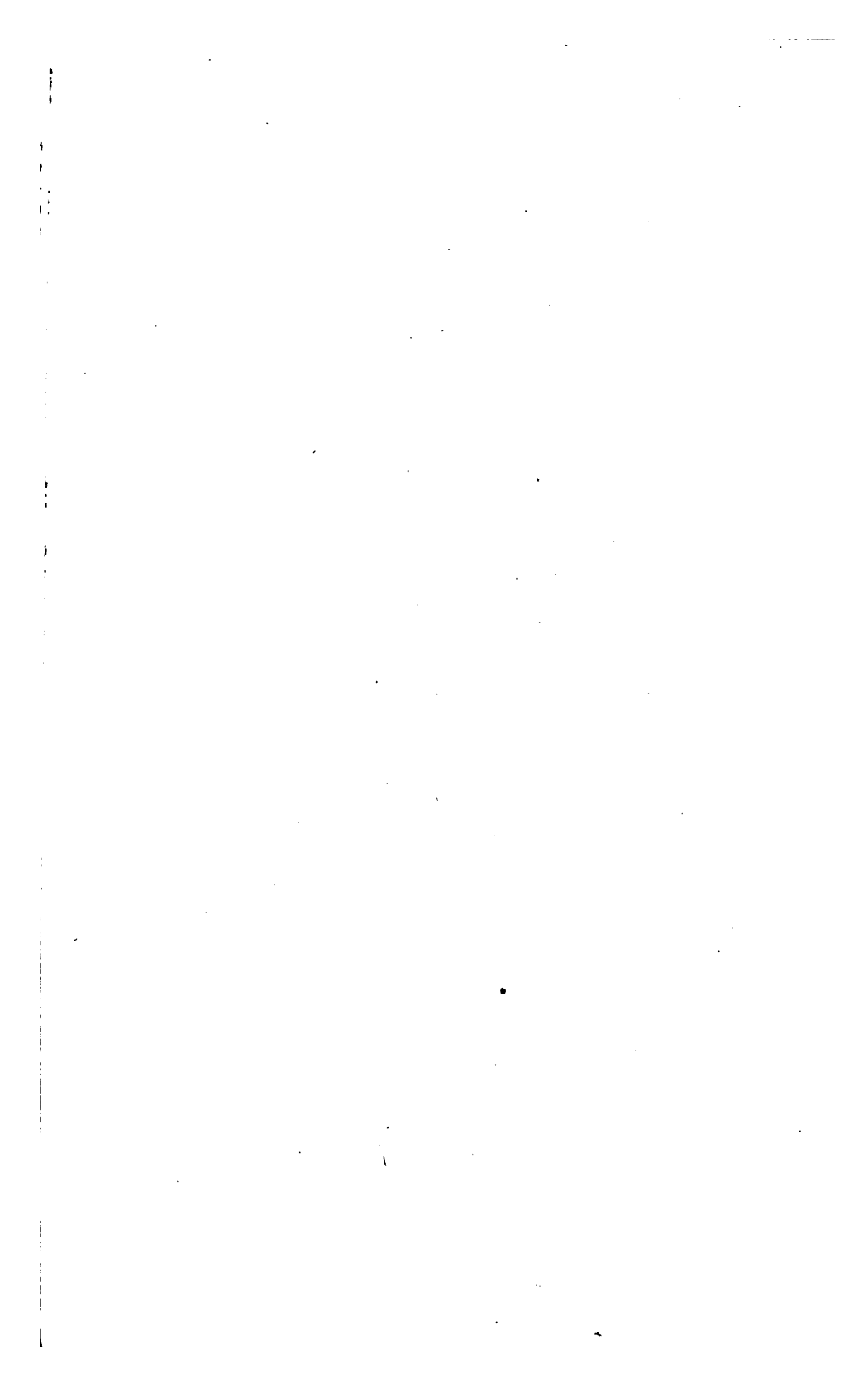
Confiding in the People and confiding in Freedom, strong in such faith, and anxious only to give fair play to the popular intelligence by removing every bar to knowledge, you will maintain a position consistent with that in which you first won public favour, and commanded the admiring attachment of,

Dear Sir,

Yours most respectfully and truly,

EDWARD BAINES.

Leeds, April 30th, 1853.



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A letter to Richard Cobden, Esq., M

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